INTERIM COMMENTS ON THE INTERIM HOUSE COMMITTEE REPORT

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The most important thing about this report may well be what is not in it. Most strikingly, it doesn't have the badly flawed substantive material which dominated the two previous reports. The substantive section in this report is disappointingly short, and one certainly must wonder if they are going after the scientific evidence in the best possible way, but this report shows a seriousness of purpose which wasn't apparent earlier. Although it may be risky to read these two pages too closely, some of the specific areas of interest are intriguing.

All in all, if you judge the Committee's progress on the basis of their public documents and statements (as I have been saying I would do), and not on the basis of the stories which have been circulating, I would give it a rating of "incomplete - passing." If I had heard more of the stories, maybe I would be more negative. Also, judging from the number and nature of the contacts with me and other researchers who have talked to me, there is not much reason for confidence that they have gotten their act together. Specifically, I have yet to see any evidence that the HSC has a firm grasp on the existing documentary evidence, such as the FBI and CIA files.

Certainly there is nothing in this report to suggest that the FBI and the CIA have a stranglehold on the HSC. (Not that such a problem would be spelled out, anyhow.) Maybe Mark Lane knows something I don't. (In fact, I'm sure he knows a lot of things I don't; some of them may be true.) I think one could argue more convincingly that the earlier two reports suggested that the Committee was in the grip of people who might keep the case from being solved. The first report cited, in a misleading and apparently incomplete way, some evidence on Oswald in Mexico, which may have been based on an uncited newspaper article; it also referred to the non-notification of the Secret Service in a way which suggested that Oswald's guilt was being assumed. The second report (April 1977) contained two pages of new leads which were, in general, neither new nor worth pursuing. Pending a study of Lane's complaints against the Committee, I'm optimistic about his apparent break with them. The negative conclusions of Harold Weisberg and Jerry Policoff carry more weight, but for the time being I still want to wait and see what the Committee can come up with.

In the introductory pages of this report, the most interesting section is on page 4, dealing with relationships with executive agencies. The complaint about "bureaucratic or technical delays" by the FBI, CIA, SS, and DoD is, in the context of this moderately phrased report, rather direct; I would guess that it is a way of putting a little pressure on the agencies to cooperate.

I am curious why the DEA is prominently mentioned as a cooperating agency, and where all that travel in October and November was. Also, if the critics are included in the 22 September consultants. I suspect that the Donovan Gay story, if any, is buried in the section on security matters, which appears designed to reassure the Congressmen who might have been upset by the leaks from the 'old' HSC.

The only basic criticism I have of the section on "Special Projects" is that scientific studies really don't call for all this secrecy. We could be told exactly what the issues are. We can't really tell if they are really focusing on basic physical/scientific evidence - maybe it is just the least sensitive part of their work - but if they are, that's a good sign.

It is worth noting that these six projects are at notably different stages. The pathologists have met, and recommended further work, which is currently being undertaken. The tests for authenticity of the X-rays and photos will be done. An inventory of medical evidence is being completed (how long could that take?), and the HSC will attempt to locate anything that is missing. A ballistics analysis is being done; wound ballistics is only being considered. Photos have been collected, and lots of analysis will be done. The status of the acoustical project is uncertain; they are evidently now searching for recordings. Handwriting experts will be brought in.

Zodiac News Service thought the most important item is that the HSC is looking for JFK's brain and other missing evidence. What strikes me most is the paragraph dealing solely with tests of the authenticity of the photos and X-rays. Except to

a small number of serious researchers, the idea of inauthentic photos is a rather kooky one, and this is a singularly unkooky report. That is, I don't think this paragraph would be in this report unless the HSC was taking this idea quite seriously.

If taken literally, the first sentence on page 8 reads, in part, "The committee is analyzing the medical evidence in [the JFK] assassination to assist it ... in evaluating the conduct of various individuals and institutions subsequent to the assassination." Unless this is a rather awkward way of saying what is said about the purpose of the ballistics analysis - "to evaluate the investigations that were performed regarding [the] assassination" - it is quite cryptic. I'm not at all sure what it might mean.

The impression given by the list of projects recommended by the pathologists is that a number of serious questions were considered unresolved. The interest in "the origin of particular bone fragments" is especially intriguing - presumably this refers to the Harper fragment.

In the acoustics section, the reference to "decible frequencies" doesn't make sense to me, unless it means "decibels vs. frequencies" - that is, a plot of volume against pitch. This appears to be a trivial error, but it is a reminder that we can't rely on all those Washington lawyers to grasp and write about technical matters. The author of this section seems impressed that "it is now possible to illustrate the audible sounds by means of a computer printout of decible frequencies." This method of illustration is hardly high technology, and the fact that it can be done as "computer printout" isn't really relevant to anything.

Nonetheless, the acoustic analysis is a promising idea. In Penn Jones' TCI (8/22/77), Gary Mack wrote about his filtering and analysis of the DPD radio tapes, with the noise from the motorcycle microphone at the time of the shooting. Mack's conclusion about the number of shots seems controversial, but his description of the possibilities of the method is persuasive. (I have been interested for years in the early copy of the DPD tape which the Secret Service obtained, with the intention of filtering and rerecording it; I've never been able to locate any followup records on this. I did suggest that the HSC pursue it.)

As I recall, some very sophisticated acoustical analysis was done of tapes of the Kent State shootings, in an attempt to determine which guns were fired in which order. I don't know of any recordings of the JFK assassination (except the DPD tape); I vaguely recall that one marketed recording came to the attention of the Warren Commission and was determined to be a reconstruction.

P.S. (Unrelated):

By letter of 14 Feb 78, the CIA advised that the final batch of JFK assassination documents will be released in approximately six to eight weeks.

This batch should go through the Rockefeller Commission investigation (at least), and might be very interesting indeed. If anyone is interested in buying it, let's get together.